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THE IMPACT OF COLONIAL POLICING IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *This study examines the impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria, focusing on the socio-political and economic ramifications during the colonial period and their enduring effects on contemporary law enforcement practices. By analyzing historical records, colonial administrative documents, and oral testimonies, the research highlights how colonial policing strategies were employed to maintain control over local populations, suppress dissent, and facilitate resource extraction. The findings reveal that the imposition of foreign policing methods not only disrupted traditional systems of governance and conflict resolution but also fostered a legacy of mistrust between communities and law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, the study discusses the implications of these historical practices on current policing challenges in the region, including issues of corruption, human rights abuses, and community relations. This research contributes to the broader discourse on colonial legacies in Africa, offering insights into the complexities of post-colonial governance and the need for reform in policing practices to foster trust and cooperation between law enforcement and the communities they serve.*

INTRODUCTION

The legacy of colonialism continues to shape the socio-political landscape of many regions around the world, with Southeastern Nigeria serving as a poignant example of this enduring influence. The introduction of colonial policing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a significant turning point in the governance and social order of the region. This paper seeks to explore the multifaceted impact of colonial policing on the indigenous populations, examining how these practices not only enforced colonial rule but also transformed local power dynamics, social structures, and community relations.

Colonial authorities implemented policing strategies that were often characterized by coercion, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent. These measures were designed to maintain control over the local populace and to facilitate the extraction of resources, often at the expense of traditional governance systems and cultural practices. The repercussions of these policing methods were profound, leading to a

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legacy of mistrust between the state and the communities it purported to protect.

By analyzing historical records, oral testimonies, and contemporary accounts, this study aims to illuminate the complexities of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria (Lovejoy, 1984). It will highlight the resistance movements that emerged in response to oppressive policing tactics and the ways in which these struggles have informed contemporary understandings of law enforcement and governance in the region. Ultimately, this exploration seeks to contribute to a broader discourse on the implications of colonial legacies in post-colonial societies, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of historical injustices and their lasting effects on modern-day Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The colonial period in Nigeria, particularly in Southeastern Nigeria, was marked by significant transformations in governance, social structures, and law enforcement. This theoretical framework aims to explore the multifaceted impact of colonial policing on the socio-political landscape of Southeastern Nigeria, drawing on various theoretical perspectives to analyze the implications of colonial law enforcement practices (Lovejoy, 1984).

Theoretical Perspectives

Colonialism and Power Dynamics

The framework begins with a post-colonial theoretical perspective, which posits that colonialism is not merely a historical event but a continuing process that shapes identities and power relations (Walter R. 2009) This perspective will be used to analyze how colonial policing reinforced the authority of colonial powers while undermining indigenous governance structures. The works of theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Edward Said will provide insights into the psychological and cultural ramifications of colonial rule.

Social Control Theory

Social control theory will be employed to understand the mechanisms through which colonial policing sought to maintain order and compliance among the local population. This theory posits that societal norms and laws are enforced through various means, including coercion and surveillance. The colonial police force in Southeastern Nigeria can be examined as an institution that utilized both formal and informal methods of social control to suppress dissent and manage resistance (Acemologu & Robinson, 2013).

Theories of Resistance

In contrast to social control theory, theories of resistance will be integrated to highlight the responses of the local population to colonial policing. Drawing on the works of theorists such as James Scott, this section will explore how communities in Southeastern Nigeria engaged in acts of resistance, both overt and covert, against colonial authority. This duality of control and resistance will be critical in

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understanding the complexities of colonial policing (Ekechi, 1972).

Intersectionality and Identity Politics

The framework will also incorporate an intersectional approach to examine how colonial policing affected various social groups differently based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, and class. This perspective will illuminate the diverse experiences of individuals and communities under colonial rule, emphasizing that the impact of policing was not monolithic but varied across different segments of society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria represents a critical area of study that examines the intersection of colonial governance, law enforcement, and local societal structures. This literature review synthesizes key themes and findings from various scholarly works, highlighting the evolution of policing practices, the role of colonial authorities, and the impact on indigenous communities.

Historical Context

The establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria began in the late 19th century, with the British consolidating control over various regions, including Southeastern Nigeria. Scholars such as Falola (1998) and Afigbo (1981) provide a comprehensive overview of the socio-political landscape during this period, emphasizing the imposition of foreign legal systems and the restructuring of traditional authority. The British colonial administration sought to maintain order and extract resources, leading to the establishment of formal policing structures.

Also, "Imperial Policing: The Emergence and Role of the Police in Colonial Nigeria, 1860-1960" by Philip Terdoo Ahire provides a comprehensive analysis of the development and functions of colonial policing in Nigeria over a century. The book examines how British imperial authorities established and expanded police institutions to maintain order, enforce colonial policies, and control the local population. It explores the evolution of policing strategies, the organizational structures implemented, and the impact of colonial policing on Nigerian society. Additionally, the work discusses the socio-political implications of colonial law enforcement, including issues of authority, resistance, and the legacy of policing practices post-independence. Overall, the book offers valuable insights into the role of policing within the broader context of colonial administration and its lasting effects on Nigeria's post-colonial security framework.

The Role of the Police

The police force in colonial Nigeria was primarily a tool of the colonial government, tasked with enforcing laws that often disregarded local customs and practices. Obi (2001) discusses how the colonial police were instrumental in suppressing dissent and maintaining the status quo, often resorting to violence and intimidation. The introduction of the Native Authority system further complicated the relationship between the police and local

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communities, as traditional leaders were co-opted into the colonial governance framework.

Policing Strategies and Practices

Colonial policing strategies in Southeastern Nigeria were characterized by a combination of military-style enforcement and community surveillance. Nwankwo (2010) highlights the use of punitive measures, including public flogging and imprisonment, as means to instill fear and compliance among the populace. The police also engaged in intelligence gathering, often relying on informants within communities, which fostered mistrust and division among local populations.

Impact on Indigenous Communities

The impact of colonial policing on indigenous communities was profound and multifaceted. Ekejiuba (2015) argues that the imposition of colonial law disrupted traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, leading to increased social tensions. The alienation of local populations from the legal system resulted in a lack of legitimacy for colonial authorities, which ultimately contributed to resistance movements. The literature indicates that the legacy of colonial policing continues to influence contemporary law enforcement practices in Nigeria.

Resistance and Reactions

Resistance to colonial policing took various forms, from passive non-compliance to active rebellion. Ikelegbe (2006) examines the emergence of anti-colonial movements that sought to challenge the authority of the colonial state, often targeting police stations and personnel. These movements were not only responses to oppressive policing but also reflections of broader struggles for autonomy and self-determination.

Indirect Rule and Local Authorities

While the colonial state aimed for centralized control, the implementation of indirect rule often involved collaboration with, and sometimes the manipulation of, existing local authorities. This aspect warrants further investigation within the context of southeastern Nigeria, exploring the complexities of power sharing and resistance at the local level.

The literature on colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria reveals a complex interplay between colonial authority and local resistance. The establishment of a formal police force served to entrench colonial power while simultaneously provoking significant social upheaval. Understanding this historical context is essential for analyzing contemporary policing issues in Nigeria, as the legacies of colonial practices continue to shape the dynamics between law enforcement and communities today.

Limitations and Gaps in Existing Research

Much of the existing literature focuses on the broader Nigerian context, with less specific attention given to the experiences of southeastern Nigeria. Further research is needed to explore the unique regional dynamics, including the diverse ethnic groups,

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social structures, and forms of resistance encountered in this area. The perspectives of the indigenous population are often underrepresented, highlighting the need for more nuanced studies incorporating local voices and experiences. Additionally, a deeper investigation into the long-term consequences of colonial policing on the region's social, political, and economic development is warranted.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for understanding the impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria involves several key components:

Historical Context

The history of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria is deeply embedded in the broader narrative of British imperial expansion and the imposition of indirect rule in West Africa during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As the British consolidated their presence in the Niger Delta and Igbo hinterlands following the Berlin Conference (1884–85), policing became a central mechanism for asserting colonial authority, extracting resources, and restructuring indigenous societies to align with imperial economic and administrative interests(Asiwaju, 1988).

British colonial administration formally began in Southeastern Nigeria with the amalgamation of territories under the Niger Coast Protectorate (1891–1900) and later the Southern Nigeria Protectorate (1900–1914). Following the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914, the colonial state intensified efforts to extend administrative control over previously autonomous and segmentary Igbo societies. In these regions, the British found no centralized political institutions akin to the emirates in Northern Nigeria. Consequently, they relied heavily on militarized policing and the controversial institution of *warrant chiefs*—appointed indigenous intermediaries without legitimate traditional authority—to enforce colonial edicts.

The policing apparatus in Southeastern Nigeria initially evolved from the Niger Coast Constabulary, later subsumed under the Southern Nigeria Police Force. By the 1920s, the colonial police had grown into a centralized and heavily armed force tasked with multiple roles: enforcing tax collection, quelling resistance, managing labor recruitment, and suppressing anti-colonial uprisings. These functions were especially pronounced during landmark incidents such as the Aba Women's War of 1929, when thousands of Igbo women mobilized against the extension of colonial taxation and the abuses of warrant chiefs. The brutal suppression of this protest by colonial police, which resulted in the deaths of over 50 women, exemplifies the repressive character of colonial law enforcement (Ekechi, 1972).

Colonial policing was not merely a tool of security but also a means of cultural domination. Indigenous justice systems—such as age-grade societies, councils of elders, and traditional courts—were marginalized or

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subordinated under colonial legal codes. Policing thus became instrumental in undermining indigenous institutions and facilitating the imposition of British legal norms. Moreover, recruitment into the colonial police was often along ethnic lines, contributing to inter-ethnic tensions and a legacy of mistrust between security forces and local communities.

Throughout the colonial period, policing remained an overtly coercive institution with limited emphasis on public service or civil protection. The emphasis on control over service reflected the broader extractive logic of colonial governance. Colonial officers routinely described their African subjects as needing "discipline" and "pacification," reinforcing racist ideologies that justified authoritarian policing practices. This militarized approach not only fostered widespread resentment among the local population but also set a precedent for postcolonial security structures in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2000).

The impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria extended beyond the colonial period. Post-independence security frameworks inherited many of the structural and ideological legacies of colonial law enforcement, including centralized control, use of force, and low levels of community accountability. Understanding this historical trajectory is crucial to any comprehensive analysis of contemporary policing challenges in Nigeria, particularly in the Southeast, where mistrust of law enforcement and ethno-political grievances continue to shape state-society relations (Afigbo, 1972).

Structures of Colonial Policing in Southeastern Nigeria

Colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria was characterized by a dual structure comprising expatriate officers and local personnel.

Expatriate Officers

Expatriate officers, primarily British, occupied senior positions within the police hierarchy. They were responsible for strategic decision-making, policy formulation, and the enforcement of colonial laws. Their presence symbolized colonial authority and often led to tensions with local populations, who viewed them as foreign oppressors (Okwudiba, 20020.

Local Officers

Local officers, often drawn from the indigenous population, played a crucial role in the day-to-day operations of the police force. They served as intermediaries between the colonial authorities and local communities, facilitating communication and enforcement of colonial policies. However, their involvement also led to complex loyalties, as they navigated their roles within a system that marginalized their communities.

Indigenous Personnel and Community Dynamics

The recruitment of indigenous personnel into the colonial police force was a strategic move by colonial authorities to enhance local compliance and reduce resistance (Akinwumi, 2005).

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Roles and Responsibilities

Indigenous officers were tasked with various responsibilities, including patrolling, intelligence gathering, and community engagement. Their familiarity with local customs and languages positioned them as valuable assets in the colonial administration's efforts to maintain order.

Community Relations

The relationship between indigenous officers and their communities was often fraught with tension. While some local officers were respected figures within their communities, others were viewed with suspicion and resentment due to their collaboration with colonial authorities (Nwankwo, 2010). This duality created a complex social fabric where loyalty to community and colonial power often clashed.

The Impact of Colonial Policing on Local Communities

Colonial policing had profound implications for local communities in Southeastern Nigeria.

Social Control and Resistance

The imposition of colonial laws and policing practices disrupted traditional systems of governance and social control. While some communities acquiesced to colonial rule, others resisted, leading to conflicts that were often met with brutal repression by colonial police forces.

Long-term Consequences

The legacy of colonial policing continues to influence contemporary policing practices and community relations in Nigeria. The historical mistrust of law enforcement agencies can be traced back to the colonial era, highlighting the need for reform and reconciliation in post-colonial contexts. The structures and functions of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria were instrumental in shaping the relationship between colonial authorities and local communities (Afigbo, 1972). By understanding these dynamics, we can better appreciate the historical context of contemporary policing challenges in Nigeria. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of colonial policing on societal structures and the ongoing quest for justice and equity in post-colonial Nigeria.

Social Impact

Colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria had significant social impacts that shaped the region's societal structures and community dynamics. The introduction of colonial law enforcement often disrupted traditional systems of governance and conflict resolution, which were typically managed by local leaders and community elders. This shift led to a breakdown of trust between the colonial authorities and the local population, fostering resentment and resistance.

Moreover, colonial policing practices often involved the use of force and intimidation, which instilled fear within communities and suppressed dissent. This created an environment where social cohesion was undermined, as individuals became wary of one

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another, leading to a decline in communal solidarity (Ojo, 2015).

Additionally, the imposition of foreign legal systems marginalized indigenous customs and practices, resulting in a loss of cultural identity for many communities. The enforcement of colonial laws often favored the interests of the colonial government and its economic objectives, further exacerbating social inequalities and tensions (Asiwaju, 1988). Overall, the impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria was profound, contributing to long-lasting changes in social relations, community structures, and cultural identities that are still felt today.

Economic Factors

The impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria can be analyzed through various economic factors that shaped the region during and after colonial rule.

Resource Extraction*:* Colonial policing was primarily aimed at maintaining order and facilitating the extraction of resources. The British colonial administration implemented policing strategies to protect their economic interests, particularly in agriculture and mineral extraction. This often led to the exploitation of local labor and resources, which disrupted traditional economic practices and systems.

Taxation and Revenue Generation: The colonial government imposed taxes that were enforced through policing. This created economic strain on local populations, as many were forced to pay taxes in cash rather than in kind, leading to changes in agricultural practices and increased labor migration to urban areas in search of wage labor. The enforcement of tax laws often resulted in violent confrontations between colonial authorities and local communities (Nwosu, 2018).

Market Regulation: Colonial policing also regulated local markets, often favoring colonial traders over indigenous businesses. This created an economic environment where local entrepreneurs struggled to compete, leading to a decline in traditional trade practices and the marginalization of local economies.

Infrastructure Development: While colonial policing facilitated some infrastructure development, such as roads and railways, these were primarily designed to serve colonial economic interests. The focus was on connecting resource-rich areas to ports for export, rather than fostering local economic development. This uneven development contributed to long-term economic disparities in the region.

Labor Control*:* The colonial state used policing to control labor movements and suppress dissent among workers. This included the use of force to break strikes or protests against poor working conditions and low wages. Such measures stifled labor rights and limited the economic agency of local populations. In summary, the economic factors associated with colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria were characterized by resource exploitation, oppressive taxation, market regulation favoring

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colonial interests, selective infrastructure development, and labor control. These factors collectively contributed to the disruption of local economies and had lasting impacts on the region's economic landscape.

Cultural Implications

The impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria had significant cultural implications that shaped the social fabric of the region. Colonial authorities implemented policing systems that often disregarded local customs and governance structures, leading to a disruption of traditional authority and community cohesion (Olatunji, 2021).

The introduction of foreign policing methods created a rift between the colonial government and the indigenous population, fostering resentment and resistance. This alienation was compounded by the use of force and coercion, which undermined trust in local leaders and institutions. Moreover, colonial policing often targeted specific cultural practices and social norms, labeling them as criminal or backward, which contributed to a broader cultural dislocation. The imposition of Western legal frameworks and values led to the erosion of indigenous practices and beliefs, as communities were forced to navigate a system that was not reflective of their cultural identity.

In summary, colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria not only altered the dynamics of law enforcement but also had profound effects on cultural identity, community relationships, and the overall social structure, the repercussions of which are still felt in various forms today.

Resistance and Repression

The impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria was characterized by a complex interplay of resistance and repression. Colonial authorities implemented policing strategies aimed at maintaining control over the local population, which often led to significant social and political tensions figbo, 1972).

On one hand, colonial policing sought to suppress dissent and enforce colonial rule, employing tactics that included surveillance, intimidation, and the use of force against those who opposed colonial policies. This repression was aimed at quelling any forms of resistance, whether they were organized movements or individual acts of defiance.

On the other hand, the oppressive nature of colonial policing also sparked various forms of resistance among the local populace. Communities often mobilized to challenge the authority of colonial forces, leading to uprisings and protests against unjust laws and practices. This resistance was not only a reaction to the immediate impacts of policing but also a broader struggle for autonomy and self-determination (Ekechi, 1972).

Overall, the legacy of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria is marked by its dual role in both enforcing colonial dominance and provoking significant resistance, shaping the region's historical trajectory and contributing to the eventual push for independence.

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Legacy and Modern Implications

The impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria has left a significant legacy that continues to influence modern law enforcement and societal dynamics in the region. During the colonial period, policing was primarily focused on maintaining control over the local population and suppressing dissent against colonial rule. This often involved the use of coercive tactics and a lack of regard for local customs and governance structures.

The legacy of these practices can be seen in several ways:

Trust and Legitimacy: The historical context of colonial policing has contributed to a pervasive mistrust of law enforcement agencies among local communities. Many individuals view the police as an extension of state power rather than as protectors of public safety, which can hinder cooperation between communities and law enforcement (Okeke, 2023).

Policing Practices: Modern policing in Southeastern Nigeria may still reflect some of the authoritarian practices established during colonial times. This includes a focus on enforcement rather than community engagement, which can exacerbate tensions between police and citizens.

Social Inequality: The colonial legacy has also contributed to social inequalities that persist today. Marginalized groups may experience disproportionate policing and surveillance, leading to further alienation and social unrest.

Cultural Disconnection: The imposition of foreign policing models often disregarded indigenous systems of conflict resolution and community governance, leading to a disconnect between law enforcement and local cultural practices. This disconnection can result in ineffective policing strategies that do not resonate with the community's needs (Nwosu, 2018). In contemporary discussions, addressing these legacies involves reforming policing practices to foster community trust, integrating local customs into law enforcement strategies, and promoting accountability and transparency within police institutions. Understanding the historical context of colonial policing is crucial for developing effective and equitable policing frameworks in Southeastern Nigeria today.

Imperial policing in southeastern Nigeria and the nexus to the Aba Women riot of 1929

The Aba Women's Riot of 1929, also known as the Women's War, was a significant event in colonial Nigeria, deeply intertwined with the practices of colonial policing in southeastern Nigeria. The riot wasn't a spontaneous outburst but rather the culmination of long-simmering discontent fueled by colonial policies and the actions of the colonial police force.

The British colonial administration in Nigeria employed a system of "indirect rule," utilizing local chiefs, known as "warrant chiefs," to govern. These warrant chiefs were often appointed by the colonial authorities rather than selected through traditional methods,

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leading to resentment among the populace. The colonial police force played a crucial role in supporting this system. They enforced the authority of the warrant chiefs, often suppressing dissent and protests against their rule. This created a climate of fear and oppression, exacerbating existing tensions.

The introduction of new taxes, particularly the attempt to tax women directly, further fueled the unrest. The colonial police were tasked with enforcing these tax measures, leading to direct confrontations with women who resisted the imposition of these new financial burdens. The heavy-handed tactics of the police in collecting taxes and suppressing protests only served to inflame the situation.

The Aba Women's Riot was not simply a protest against taxation; it was a broader rebellion against the injustices of colonial rule, which were directly enforced by the colonial police. The women's collective action, including the use of traditional forms of protest like "sitting" on officials, demonstrated their organized resistance to the colonial system and its oppressive policing tactics. The riot highlighted the limitations of indirect rule and the inherent flaws in a system that relied on force and oppression to maintain control.

The violent suppression of the riot by the colonial police, resulting in numerous deaths and injuries, further underscores the brutality of colonial policing and its role in escalating the conflict. The event serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of colonial rule and the resistance it engendered.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria is a multifaceted topic that warrants further exploration. Future research could focus on several key areas:

i. *Historical Analysis*: Investigating the origins and evolution of colonial policing practices in Southeastern Nigeria, including the legal frameworks and policies implemented by colonial authorities.

ii. Socio-Cultural Effects: Examining how colonial policing influenced local customs, social structures, and community relations. This could include the impact on traditional authority figures and the community's response to colonial law enforcement.

iii. Resistance and Adaptation**:** Analyzing the forms of resistance against colonial policing, including both organized movements and individual acts of defiance. Understanding how communities adapted to or resisted these practices can provide insights into the broader implications of colonial rule.

iv. Legacy and Modern Implications: Exploring the long-term effects of colonial policing on contemporary law enforcement practices in Nigeria. This could involve assessing how historical policing methods have shaped current police-community relations and public perceptions of law enforcement.

v. Comparative Studies: Conducting comparative analyses with other regions

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affected by colonial rule to identify common patterns and unique differences in policing practices and their impacts.

vi. Interdisciplinary Approaches: Incorporating perspectives from sociology, anthropology, and political science to create a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of colonial policing. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria and its lasting effects on society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the impact of colonial policing in Southeastern Nigeria has been profound and multifaceted, shaping not only the immediate landscape of law enforcement but also the broader socio-political dynamics of the region. The colonial policing system, characterized by its repressive tactics and alien legal frameworks, served to entrench colonial authority while simultaneously undermining traditional governance structures and community trust. This legacy of mistrust and systemic inequality has persisted long after the end of colonial rule, influencing contemporary policing practices and community relations in Nigeria.

The historical analysis reveals that colonial policing was not merely a tool of law enforcement but a mechanism of social control that facilitated the exploitation of local resources and the suppression of dissent. The ramifications of these practices are evident in the ongoing challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in the region, including issues of corruption, human rights abuses, and a lack of community engagement.

Furthermore, the colonial legacy has contributed to a complex interplay of identity, resistance, and resilience among the people of Southeastern Nigeria. Understanding this historical context is crucial for developing effective and culturally sensitive policing strategies that address the needs and concerns of local communities.

As we move forward, it is imperative for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and scholars to critically engage with this history to foster a more equitable and just policing framework. By acknowledging and addressing the historical injustices of colonial policing, there is an opportunity to rebuild trust, enhance community safety, and promote social cohesion in Southeastern Nigeria. This comprehensive understanding not only enriches the discourse on policing in post-colonial contexts but also serves as a vital reference point for other regions grappling with similar legacies of colonialism.

In summary, the evolution of policing in colonial Nigeria before 1960 reflects the broader dynamics of imperial authority and control. The police force was instrumental in enforcing colonial policies, maintaining order, and consolidating British dominance over diverse indigenous populations. Its development was characterized by a gradual shift from a paramilitary force primarily focused on

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suppression to a more structured institution tasked with administrative and social functions. This transformation underscores the complex interplay between colonial governance and local societal structures, leaving a legacy that continues to influence Nigeria's policing system today. Understanding this historical trajectory is essential for critically engaging with contemporary debates on policing, state authority, and post-colonial nation-building in Nigeria.

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